



Essay

“WESTERN CIVILIZATION” AND THE ACCELERATION OF TIME. RICHARD LÖWENTHAL’S REFLECTIONS ON A CRISIS OF “THE WEST” IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE STUDENT REVOLT OF “1968”¹

By Riccardo Bavaj

“The West” was in crisis – yet again. And Richard Löwenthal was deeply worried. The socio-political order of the Federal Republic had been challenged by the student revolt, and its impact was felt particularly strongly at the Free University Berlin where Löwenthal, born in 1908, had been professor of International Relations since the early 1960s. West Germany’s intellectual foundation had been attacked, and for someone like Löwenthal who had experienced the demise of Germany’s first experiment in liberal democracy, it seemed as though Weimar’s shadows were hanging over the Federal Republic deeper than ever before. The fateful tradition of German romanticism, “anti-liberal and anti-Western” as he put it, appeared to have resurfaced once again. This time, however, it was not outright authoritarianism, but a leftist renaissance of romantic-utopian thought that haunted the “second republic”.²

Avowed advocate of what he saw as “Western values”, Löwenthal was amongst the most articulate exponents of “consensus liberalism”, which was, as Michael Hochgeschwender has argued, the “fundamental ideology of the West” from the 1940s to the late 1960s.³ For liberal scholars like Löwenthal, whose self-imposed mission was to anchor the Federal Republic firmly in the realm of what had come to be known as “Western democracies”, nothing less than the success of their chief political project was at stake in “1968”. It seemed as though West Germany’s stability had been seriously undermined, and its security jeopardized.

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- 1 Essay on the source: Löwenthal, Richard: Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise. Zukunftsprobleme der westlichen Demokratien (1979).
- 2 Löwenthal, Richard, Vorwort, in: Löwenthal, Richard, Der romantische Rückfall. Wege und Irrwege einer rückwärts gewendeten Revolution, Stuttgart 1970, pp. 5-10, here p. 8.
- 3 Hochgeschwender, Michael, Was ist der Westen? Zur Ideengeschichte eines politischen Konstrukts, in: Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen 11 (2004), pp. 1-30, here p. 27; see also Doering-Manteuffel, Anselm, Wie westlich sind die Deutschen?, Göttingen 1999; Gassert, Philipp, Die Bundesrepublik, Europa und der Westen. Zur Verwestlichung, Demokratisierung und einigen komparatistischen Defiziten der zeithistorischen Forschung, in: Baberowski, Jörg et al, Geschichte ist immer Gegenwart. Vier Thesen zur Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 67-89; Nehring, Holger, “Westernization”. A New Paradigm for Interpreting West European History in a Cold War Context, in: Cold War History 4 (2004), No. 2, pp. 175-191; for the term “consensus liberalism” see especially Hochgeschwender, Michael, Freiheit in der Offensive? Der Kongress für kulturelle Freiheit und die Deutschen, Munich 1998, pp. 68-86; Hodgson, Godfrey, America in Our Time. From World War II to Nixon, new ed. New York 2005 (first ed. 1976).

Liberal scholars in the Federal Republic typically perceived the revolt as yet another fatal deviation of German history from “the West”. This may seem astonishing given the transnational dimension of student protest in the mid- and late-1960s. Yet to make sense of this challenge, they fell back on the “special path” interpretation that had gained currency in the previous decade. They were determined to drag the Federal Republic away from the murky currents of Germany’s past by “Westernizing” its political culture, and found their goal torpedoed by radical students who had a rather ambiguous relationship to “the West”.⁴

Löwenthal’s strategy of dealing with the student challenge, however, was more complex. He combined the thesis of Germany’s “special path” with the notion of a “crisis of Western civilization”. He was the only liberal scholar in West Germany who pursued that avenue. Well aware of the transnational nature of the student revolt, Löwenthal looked beyond the framework of the nation state. While the Federal Republic was surely the country he cared about most deeply, he was convinced that analyzing the crisis would require looking at a bigger picture: in particular, at the United States, the supposed apex of Western civilization where things did not seem to look very bright either.

In fact, it was on a research trip to Stanford University during the academic year 1968-69 that Löwenthal developed his argument of a “crisis of Western civilization”. To be sure, as early as 1965, during a one-year fellowship at Columbia University, Löwenthal had given a lecture on “totalitarianism and the future of civilization”, in which he discussed “symptoms of moral and cultural crisis” that “were now visible in the most advanced Western countries”.⁵ Yet he did not elaborate on this theme until 1969 when he gave a lecture at the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, entitled “unreason and revolution”⁶, apparently mocking the title of Marcuse’s Hegel book⁷. For almost the rest of his life, Löwenthal was preoccupied with Western civilization and the challenge of its preservation. He engaged with this issue most rigorously in a collection of essays entitled “Social Change and Cultural Crisis”, that first appeared in German in 1979. A revised version was published in English five years later.⁸

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- 4 See Bavaj, Riccardo, Das Trauma von “1968”. Liberale Hochschullehrer in Westdeutschland und Frankreich, in: *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 6 (2009), No. 1, pp. 101-114; Bavaj, Riccardo, Deutscher Staat und westliche Demokratie. Karl Dietrich Bracher und Erwin K. Scheuch zur Zeit der Studentenrevolte von 1967/68, in: *Geschichte im Westen* 23 (2008), pp. 149-171; see also Gassert, Philipp, Gegen Ost und West. Antiamerikanismus in der Bundesrepublik, in: Junker, Detlef (ed.), *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges 1945-1990. Ein Handbuch*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 944-954, here pp. 953-954; Gassert, Philipp, Mit Amerika gegen Amerika. Antiamerikanismus in Westdeutschland, in: Junker (ed.), *USA und Deutschland*, Vol. 2, pp. 750-760.
 - 5 Löwenthal, Richard, The Totalitarian Revolutions of our Time. Manuscript written for the series “The 1965 Keynote Lectures” broadcast on Radio Free Europe in 1965, in: Löwenthal, Richard, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus. Schriften zur Weltanschauungsdiktatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Mike Schmeitzner, Göttingen 2009, pp. 475-545, here p. 541.
 - 6 Löwenthal gave the lecture in February 1969. It was published several times in German and English: Löwenthal, Richard, Unvernunft und Revolution. Über die Loslösung der revolutionären Praxis von der marxistischen Theorie, in: *Der Monat* 21 (1969), No. 251, also in Löwenthal, *Romantischer Rückfall*, pp. 41-87; see also the interview with Löwenthal on the “worldwide revolt of the young” in Irving Howe’s journal *Dissent*, May-June 1969, pp. 214-224.
 - 7 Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, London 1941 (revised ed. New York 1954; 6th ed. Boston 1968).
 - 8 Löwenthal: *Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise*; Löwenthal, Richard, *Social Change and Cultural Crisis*, New York 1984.

Before giving an outline of Löwenthal's reflections, it is necessary to clarify what he meant by "Western values". Rather conveniently, he drew up a five-point check list of what he thought were essential features of "Western civilization". To mention the three most important ones: the belief in the autonomy of reason as the key for any understanding of the world; the belief in the uniqueness of the individual endowed with inalienable rights; and the conception of work, intellectual and physical, as a means of acquiring merit and giving meaning to life. Löwenthal maintained that this cluster of fundamental values was at the heart of the "unique dynamic" of "Western civilization".⁹

The crux of the matter was that a dynamic civilization like "the West" generated "moral, cultural and institutional problems" that endangered its very existence. The logical conclusion was that the institutions and the "norms of conduct" that had emerged from the cluster of "Western values" needed to be adjusted in order to cope with these problems. The crucial point Löwenthal was keen to get across was that these adjustments did not take place automatically. Rather, they were the result of "political, social, and often [...] religious struggles". If people did not make the necessary adjustments for a prolonged period of time, the "norms of conduct" would become inapplicable, the institutions would lose their authority, and the framework of basic values, increasingly perceived as sheer hypocrisy, would become defunct. It was a situation like this, in which essential adjustments had not been made, that Löwenthal called a "cultural crisis" – a situation of collective anomie.¹⁰

While Löwenthal realized, in the mid-1970s, that the "explosive and violent phase of the [youth] revolt" had passed, he warned that the underlying phenomenon of a "cultural crisis" was far from over. For the disaffection of the "young Western intelligentsia" with pluralist democracy was merely an epiphenomenon of a "long-term cultural crisis" which prevailed despite the continued ability of the social and political system to function reasonably well. He was particularly worried about "West-wide phenomena" such as the decline of the work ethic and the dissolution of social cohesion, all of which pointed to severe problems in socialization and identity formation. Far more serious than the abstract sloganeering of a "Great Refusal" during the student revolt, these symptoms of social "decay" revealed a serious "cultural crisis" that undermined the authority of "Western" institutions.¹¹

In Löwenthal's opinion, two developments were responsible for this crisis: First, the destruction of the belief in a meaningful course of history led to a "loss of world orientation" (*Weltbildverlust*). The faith in a continual progress of rationality, which had supposedly replaced any transcendental belief system, had become discredited by a "series of historical shocks". The experience of two world wars had seriously weakened the faith in a continuous progress of reason. And this faith was further challenged in the 1960s and 1970s: above all by the Vietnam War, but also by a growing awareness of the ecological costs and natural limits of economic growth. Second, the rapid acceleration of social change had led to a "loss of ties" (*Bindungsverlust*). The gestation of a society

9 Löwenthal, Richard, *Die Intellektuellen zwischen Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise*, based on a lecture given at the Salzburg *Humanismusgespräch* in September 1976, published in: Schatz, Oskar (ed.), *Abschied von Utopia?*, Graz 1977, and Baier, Horst (ed.), *Freiheit und Sachzwang. Festschrift für Helmut Schelsky*, Opladen 1977, also in: Löwenthal: *Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise*, pp. 21-36, here pp. 26-27.

10 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

11 Ibid., pp. 29-30.

of mass consumption that transformed family structures and the role of leisure in everyday life made the process of passing on “norms of conduct” from one generation to another increasingly difficult. What Löwenthal found particularly worrying was the weakening of ties to the historical community of the nation state, a phenomenon that for obvious reasons was especially severe in the Federal Republic, but was also discernable in other “Western countries”:¹² “We are living in an age of Western self-doubt”.¹³

Löwenthal’s worries about “an important part of the young generation”, as he frequently put it¹⁴, were exacerbated by the sociological diagnosis advanced by Daniel Bell that industrial societies were undergoing a far-reaching transition, namely the transformation from an industrial society to a “post-industrial” knowledge society. As early as 1962, Bell had argued that a “post-industrial society” would give well-educated elites greater societal importance.¹⁵ Against this background, not just Löwenthal, but also Bell himself, from the late 1960s onward, worried about “crises of belief” and “societal instability”.¹⁶

In this essay, I would like to address two questions in particular: First, why did Löwenthal avail himself of the “Western crisis” paradigm when none of his West German colleagues did (at least not that prominently)? Second, why did Löwenthal make use of it when he did? While it is certainly rather difficult to account fully for the rationale behind Löwenthal’s usage of the “Western crisis” paradigm, I would suggest the following hypotheses: First, Löwenthal had always thought globally. He tackled issues of International Relations that touched on a wide range of countries, including the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and of course Western Europe and the United States. While many of his colleagues were concerned with rather parochial issues, he had always been a transnational thinker. Second, Löwenthal acted globally. Only few of his colleagues could match the range of his transnational activities. He participated in the work of a dozen of institutions, amongst them the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies and the Trilateral Commission. All of them brought together experts and intellectuals from various parts of the world.

Initially, of course, his transnational engagement was not something he embarked upon voluntarily. As a Jewish socialist, member of the Communist Party at first and then one of the leading figures of a left-socialist resistance group (*Neues Beginnen*), he emigrated to Prague in 1935 and to London four years later. He became a British citizen and worked as a news correspondent for *Reuters* and the *Observer*. To be sure, a life story like Löwenthal’s that cut across national borders time and again was not very unusual in the “age of ideologies”, to borrow a term coined by Löwenthal’s younger col-

12 Ibid., pp. 30-34.

13 Löwenthal, Richard, Von der Einzigartigkeit des Westens, in: Löwenthal: Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise, pp. 9-20, here p. 15.

14 See for instance Löwenthal, Richard, Bonn und Weimar. Zwei deutsche Demokratien, in: Winkler, Heinrich August (ed.), Politische Weichenstellungen im Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945-1953, Göttingen 1979, also in: Löwenthal: Gesellschaftswandel und Kulturkrise, pp. 257-277, here p. 275.

15 Bell, Daniel, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. A Venture in Social Forecasting, special anniversary ed. with “The Axial Age of Technology Foreword”, New York 1999 (first ed. 1973). The book did not come out until 1973, but contained articles that had been published before. Bell first articulated the idea of a “post-industrial society” in 1962.

16 Bell, Daniel, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, 20th anniversary ed. with a new afterword, New York 1996 (first ed. 1976). The German title read: Die Zukunft der westlichen Welt, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

league Karl Dietrich Bracher.¹⁷ Emigration studies have been a vibrant field of research over the last twenty years and have provided us with numerous examples of the circuitous path that many scholars had to take as a result of Hitler's dictatorship.

Against this background, a further reason must be found to explain Löwenthal's turn to the "Western crisis" paradigm. The main factor, I would argue, was Löwenthal's intellectual socialization. After studying law and economics in Berlin, he immersed himself in the intellectual cosmos of the University of Heidelberg where he became acquainted with Alfred Weber's cultural sociology and especially with the studies of Alfred's late brother.¹⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, it was indeed Max Weber, with his work on Occidental rationalization and the protestant ethic of capitalism, who strongly influenced Löwenthal's view of "Western civilization". While Löwenthal rarely referenced his texts and did not really care about the minutiae of scholarly citation techniques – in many ways, he kept his journalistic habit as an academic –, he sometimes explicitly referred to Max Weber as the main source for his theory of "Western civilization".

Weber, however, was not the only source for what would become Löwenthal's preoccupation with the "Western crisis" paradigm. Perhaps even more important was the impact of his political mentor Franz Borkenau. He first met the young historian in 1926 when he became part of a communist student association (*Kommunistische Studentenfaktion*) led by Borkenau. Both of them became increasingly disenchanted with the communist creed, especially in view of the party doctrine of "Social Fascism", the infamous "show trials" and the Hitler-Stalin-Pact.¹⁹

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Vienna-born historian developed a strong interest in the evolution of "Western civilization" which became the principal focus of his work. Typical of the discourse of "Western civilization" in general, Borkenau was not merely concerned with the beginnings of "the West", but also with its (potential) end. In 1947, he published an article in the British monthly *Horizon* which carried the laconic, if telling title "After the Atom". In it, he painted the dark scenario of the "real possibility" of an atomic war which would, even in the likely case of a Western victory, lead to the collapse of Western civilization. The assumption that its European heartland was "already in a process of decline", especially in light of Nazism's inner-Western "revolt against the West", strengthened his belief that Western civilization, devastated by an atomic war, would enter an age of disintegration and "relapse into barbarism" in a manner similar to the demise of the West Roman Empire.²⁰

17 Bracher, Karl Dietrich, *Zeit der Ideologien. Eine Geschichte politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1982.

18 See Blomert, Reinhard, *Intellektuelle im Aufbruch. Karl Mannheim, Alfred Weber, Norbert Elias und die Heidelberger Sozialwissenschaften der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Munich 1999, pp. 239-240, 243-244.

19 For a first attempt to delineate Löwenthal's transition from communism to "consensus liberalism" see Schmidt, Oliver, "Meine Heimat ist – die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung". *Biographische Studien zu Richard Löwenthal im Übergang vom Exil zur frühen Bundesrepublik*, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

20 Borkenau, Franz, *After the Atom. Life out of Death or Life in Death?* [1947], in: Borkenau, Franz, *End and Beginning. On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, ed. by Richard Löwenthal, New York 1981, pp. 437-448, here pp. 439, 441, 444; for Borkenau's views on Nazism see his account: *The Totalitarian Enemy*, London 1940. As Löwenthal's "special path" version had it, Nazism's inner-Western "revolt against the West" was a revolt that was rooted in Germany's Faustian "in-between culture", geographically situated in "the West", but culturally only partly belonging to it, given the fateful legacy of German Lutheranism. This notion was informed by

The narrative pattern of ascendancy and decline, so well displayed in Borkenau's postwar writings, were certainly characteristic of the discourse on "Western civilization" as a whole. In fact, Borkenau's reflections were not only redolent of Oswald Spengler's decline narrative; they also bore the traces of another major exponent of the "Western civ." paradigm: the British historian Arnold Toynbee whose gargantuan, multi-volume study of world civilizations has remained unmatched, though certainly not unchallenged. It was Toynbee who most prominently elaborated the view that "Western civilization", alongside twenty other civilizations in world history, would be an "intelligible unit of study", a statement that was repeatedly quoted by Borkenau – as well as by Löwenthal. Toynbee reached the height of his fame in the aftermath of the Second World War, the very moment Borkenau set out to explore the origins of "the West". It comes as no surprise that his texts were shot through with Toynbeean notions of "rhythms", "crises", and "breakdowns" of civilizations.²¹

A comprehensive comparison between Löwenthal and Borkenau would certainly transcend the scope of this essay. It is safe to say, however, that Löwenthal's views on "Western civilization" owed a great deal to the thoughts of his political and intellectual mentor. The stark dichotomy between a dynamic, creative Western and a static, "invertebrate" Eastern civilization is but one example of a large repertoire of rhetorical commonplaces that recurred in the writings of the two renegades. Indeed, it is the mental mapping of Russia, the creation of a timeless, fast-frozen image of barbaric Russian authoritarianism that is particularly striking. In the article "After the Atom", for example, Borkenau constructed a spatial, value-laden continuity between "West" and "East" that reached back to the times of Ancient Greece.²² Löwenthal, after discarding his initial preference for building a socialist Europe as a "third force" independent of East *and* West²³, bought into Borkenau's spatio-political constructions, though for the time being he did not share the pessimistic prospect Borkenau held out for "the West". Until the late 1960s, Löwenthal's view of the state of "Western civilization" was much more cheerful.

This, of course, raises the question why he began to make use of the "Western crisis" paradigm when he did. I would argue that the student revolt, which he perceived as an attack against "Western values", transformed his initial worries about the inner stability of "the West" (as articulated in his lecture from 1965²⁴) into a deep concern about "Western civilization" and a constant preoccupation with its condition of crisis. The student unrest strengthened his view that a rapid "acceleration of time"²⁵, ultimately caused by the "unique dynamic" of Western civilization itself, endangered the very existence of "the West".

Borkenau, Franz, Luther. Ost oder West?, in: Borkenau, Franz, Drei Abhandlungen zur deutschen Geschichte, Frankfurt am Main 1947, pp. 45-75.

21 For a helpful digest of Toynbee's "Western civ." narrative see Toynbee, Arnold J., *Civilization on Trial*, New York 1948; see also De Beus, J.G., *The Future of the West*, London 1953; Herman, Arthur, *The Idea of Decline in Western History*, New York 1997; McNeill, William H., *Arnold J. Toynbee. A Life*, New York 1989.

22 Borkenau, *After the Atom*, pp. 443, 445.

23 Löwenthal, Richard [Sering, Paul], *Jenseits des Kapitalismus. Ein Beitrag zur sozialistischen Neuorientierung. Mit einer ausführlichen Einführung: Nach 30 Jahren*, Bonn 1977 (first ed. 1947).

24 Löwenthal, *Totalitarian Revolutions of our Time*, pp. 541-542.

25 Koselleck, Reinhart, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 1979.

Recent studies have pointed out a whole array of far-reaching changes that “Western societies” experienced from the late 1950s onward. Andreas Wirsching, for instance, suggests that the transformation from a production-based to a consumer-oriented society was one of the hallmarks of a decisive socio-cultural change that rapidly accelerated from the late 1960s, early 1970s onward. He argues that an era of “bourgeois modernity” came to an end – an interpretation that certainly dovetails with Löwenthal’s observations, if probably not with his diagnosis of crisis.²⁶

This leads me to the following conclusion: The language of “Western civilization”, closely intertwined since the nineteenth century with notions of progress, liberty, and rationality²⁷, was an effective way of negotiating fundamental values and the future of industrially advanced pluralist societies. Löwenthal articulated his observation of rapid socio-cultural change by resorting to rhetorical patterns of “crisis”, “demise”, and the fear for “survival”, patterns deeply inscribed in the language of “Western civilization”. His main aim was to preserve security through stabilizing an identity “nested”²⁸ in the narrative community of “Western civilization”.

The usage of the “Western crisis” paradigm was indeed rooted in existential anxieties. At the same time, though, it was also deployed as a means of dramatization to raise an awareness of the dangers hovering over “the West”. In fact, it may be argued that the “crisis” term was to evoke a sense of immediacy and urgency. This would be in line with what recent reflections on the cultural construction of crises suggest. Rather than encapsulating a particular moment in time, constructs of crises often encompass a process – in our case, a wide-ranging process of socio-cultural change. The rhetoric of crisis created the notion of an acceleration of time that condensed the process of *actual* change. In other words, the dramatization of societal change perceived as alarmingly fast evoked the image of a transformation that was even more disturbing.

In another respect, however, my study of Löwenthal’s reflections on a “crisis of Western civilization” does *not* confirm recent research on the rhetorical construct of crises. It has been suggested that constructs of crises were marked by an inner ambiguity, as they offered an argument for pursuing an alternative, future-oriented political agenda that lends the notion of crisis a positive meaning.²⁹ In fact, if one would turn to socialist intellectuals such as Michael Harrington or Irving Howe, one could indeed see

26 Wirsching, Andreas, Konsum statt Arbeit? Zum Wandel von Individualität in der modernen Massengesellschaft, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 57 (2009), pp. 171-199; see also Doe-ring-Manteuffel, Anselm, Nach dem Boom. Brüche und Kontinuitäten der Industriemoderne seit 1970, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 55 (2007), pp. 559-581. Similarly, Ulrich Herbert claims that an era of “high modernity” came to a close in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Herbert, Ulrich, Europe in High Modernity. Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century, in: Journal of Modern European History 5 (2007), pp. 5-21; see also Bavaj, Riccardo, Auf der Suche nach einer europäischen Moderne, in: Kühberger, Christoph; Sedmak, Clemens (eds.), Europäische Geschichtskultur – Europäische Geschichtspolitik. Vom Erfinden, Entdecken, Erarbeiten der Bedeutung von Erinnerung für das Verständnis und Selbstverständnis Europas, Innsbruck 2009, pp. 235-247.

27 See Bonnett, Alastair, The Idea of the West. Culture, Politics and History, Basingstoke 2004; GoGwilt, Christopher, The Invention of the West. Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire, Stanford 1995; Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus, Civilizing the Enemy. German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West, Ann Arbor 2006.

28 For the concept of “nested identities” see Herb, Guntram H.; Kaplan, David H. (eds.), Nested Identities. Nationalism, Territory, and Scale, Lanham 1999.

29 See for instance Föllmer, Moritz; Graf, Rüdiger (eds.), Die “Krise” der Weimarer Republik. Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters, Frankfurt am Main 2005.

the rhetoric of crisis exploited for legitimizing socialist policy schemes.³⁰ Liberal intellectuals, however, such as the “right-wing” Social Democrat Richard Löwenthal deployed the “Western crisis” paradigm from a purely defensive angle. Far from widening the space of possibilities, they were trying to narrow it down. Their concern with the future of “Western civilization” was a concern about its survival. Whatever they suggested to change, it was for the purpose of *preserving* the status quo.

When Löwenthal tried to make sense of the rapid transformation of “Western societies” by resorting to well-established categories rooted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his verdict was bound to lead to a diagnosis of crisis. After all, the “Western civ.” paradigm was not just intertwined with notions of progress and rationality, but also with constructions of crisis.

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30 See Howe, Irving; Harrington, Michael (eds.), The Seventies. Problems and Proposals, New York 1972, especially the articles by the editors: Harrington, Michael, American Society. Burdens, Problems, Solutions, pp. 1-51, and Howe, Irving, What’s the Trouble? Social Crisis, Crisis of Civilization, or Both?, pp. 52-72.